

FOREIGN RELATIONS

A Matter of Mutual Advantage

Chairman William Fulbright sent down encouraging notes. Senator Wayne Morse amicably asked just the right leading questions and agreed enthusiastically with nearly everything the star witness said. To Secretary of State Dean Rusk, appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it must have seemed like a remembrance of days past—those halcyon, pre-Viet Nam days when he could be sure that he had a solid majority of the committee behind him. The matter under discussion, a consular treaty with the Soviet Union, might itself have been the cause of some nostalgia, for it has been waiting a long time for ratification by the Senate.

Not that the treaty is so remarkable or so very different from similar pacts the U.S. has with 28 other countries. In its most important provisions, it would simply permit diplomats of both nations to assist their citizens who have run afoul of the law and have been arrested in their travels. What bothered some Senators—and kept the pact in limbo for more than 24 years—was the fear, amply supported by statements from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, that Soviet officials would use their U.S. consulates as espionage centers.

The Hoover Letters. Hoover's testimony, offered to a House committee in 1965, has been the principal roadblock to ratification. Last week Rusk sought to minimize its impact by citing a letter from the director agreeing that the FBI could handle any increased security problems resulting from the treaty. But Rusk's intent was at least partly vitiated by the grudging tone of Hoover's letter and by a later Hoover letter that South Dakota's Karl Mundt, the treaty's most vocal opponent, brought forth. Though the FBI could take on the increased burden, Hoover conceded to Mundt, its work under the treaty would be "more difficult."

Rusk, for his part, never denied that the Russians might use consulates for spying—in the past decade, 28 Russian officials have either been expelled or arrested for espionage—but noted simply that ten to 15 Soviet consular officials, added to the 452 who already enjoy diplomatic immunity in the Washington embassy and the U.N. mission, would not "add significantly to the risk." Spying, of course, has never been claimed as a Russian monopoly, and Morse asked if the CIA might not enjoy snooping from the proposed U.S. consulate, tentatively slated for Leningrad. Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach replied somewhat uncomfortably that, indeed, "the treaty is reciprocal."

A Big Name in Moscow. The consular treaty is the keystone of President Johnson's policy of "building bridges" to the East. Ratification would not only reduce the likelihood of international incidents over infractions by unlucky or unwise tourists (which have increased as larger numbers of American travelers—18,000 last year—visit the Soviet Union); it would also serve as an important spur to other East-West agreements. Though the Russians have said repeatedly that no major breakthrough can come while the U.S. is fighting in North Viet Nam, lesser agreements, notably the treaty banning weapons of mass destruction from outer space, signed in ceremonies in Moscow, London, and Washington last week, can still be reached. Such contacts, said Rusk, "can reduce misunderstandings between our two countries and lead, in time, to international cooperation in areas where we are able to find common interests and mutual advantage."

In the end, whether the treaty passes or fails depends not so much on Rusk, Hoover or President Johnson but, as in all other measures requiring the approval of two-thirds of the Senate, on Minority Leader Everett Dirksen, who controls a pivotal number of Republican votes. At week's end, Dirksen was inclined to be against the treaty, but was clearly open to—and vastly enjoyed—attempts to change his mind. One of the suppliants, he said, was a "young man" from the Soviet embassy.

"His come-on was 'Yours is a big name in Moscow,'" Dirksen recounted gleefully, "but I told him I only wanted to be a big name here and preferably in the state of Illinois."